

# Reading Comprehension



To improve your reading comprehension, use the following 3-step process:

## I. Preview

- **Preview the textbook** by looking through the table of contents to see how the concepts are organized. Also, look for any study aids, such as a glossary, answer key, questions at the end of the chapters, etc.
  - **Preview the chapter** by spending 5-10 minutes scanning the following: headings, diagrams, charts, terms in bold, questions at the end, summary, etc.
  - **Think about what you already know** concerning the topics in the chapter.
  - **A preview can help build your interest** and focus in the text, much as a movie preview builds interest in a movie.
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## II. Active Reading

### How to read:

- **Think of the paragraph** or the section (3 or 4 paragraphs under a heading) as your unit of meaning. Do not reread when you are confused about a word or sentence; read on. The next sentence will often clarify the meaning.
- If you are still confused at the end of a section or paragraph, stop at that point to reread or to look up important, unfamiliar words.

- **For a science or technical book, think of the charts and diagrams as the heart of the text**, with sentences simply explaining what is presented visually.

#### **How to mark textbooks with many headings:**

- **Turn the heading into a question** and read that section to find the answer.
- Stop at the end of the section and **ask yourself what's most important** that you didn't know previously. Either write a note in the margin, highlight the important ideas, or do both.
- **Do not mark as you go** or you will end up marking too much. Hold off marking until you finish reading a paragraph or section.
- **Most students find that a combination of highlighting and notes in the margin works best.** Caution: when you do highlight, mark words and phrases rather than whole sentences.
- Number parts or items (for example, 3 parts of a definition, 4 causes of something, 3 requirements, etc.).
- **Look at how other students** mark their texts.

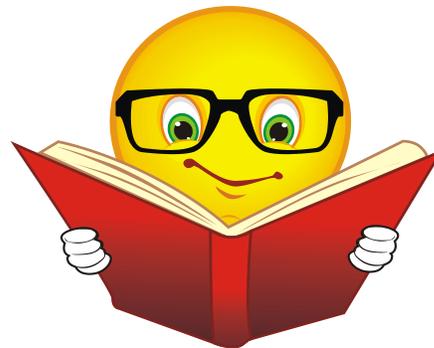
#### **How to mark books that have few or no headings:**

- Determine **your professor's purpose in assigning the book** (look at the syllabus or ask). For example, the three paperbacks in a history class may have been assigned so that you can learn how historians work and think, not with the intention that you memorize dates.
- **Decide whether you should read the book quickly or more slowly.** Ask the professor or simply note how many class meetings are devoted to the book.

- **Stop at the end of each paragraph and ask yourself the main point.** This will help you concentrate because you have something to do besides moving your eyes across the page. In most cases, students do not highlight this kind of book, preferring to write **notes in the margin or brief notes in a notebook.**
  - If you use a notebook, do not stop to write at the end of each paragraph; hold off until you have read a few pages.
  - If you will be writing a paper about the book, include pages references in your notebook entries.
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### III. Review

- When you come to the end of a chapter or reading session, spend 5-10 minutes scanning back over the headings and your own markings.
- Begin to **self-test** if time allows. (Turn a heading into a question and try to answer it; then look to see if you are right.)
- Compare your marked text with your lecture notes.
- Consider forming a **study group** to discuss the material with others and to study for exams.



## An Analogy for the Reading Process: Taking a Trip



- **Preview: Look at a map before you go.**  
You need to take a look at the whole territory so you will understand how one part relates to the others. You also need a sense of what you should look for on your trip.
- **Active Reading: Take pictures as you go.** These “pictures” (your highlighting or notes) will not show the entire trip but will act as “memory pegs” to help you recall your trip.
- **Review: Look over your “pictures” and recall your trip.**

## Reading Difficult Books

- Preview your book by first reading a simplified version (a review book or outline book, a high school text, an online summary, etc.) For example, if you find that you’re having trouble reading Kant, stop and read a brief summary of his ideas and then return to the original text.
- If a text is extremely difficult, read it twice rather than doing a single slow reading. (If you read too slowly, you may begin to lose sight of the major concepts.)
- Try reading aloud.
- Get help. Consult with your professor, a tutor, or a fellow student.
- To build your interest and/or to clarify concepts, look on YouTube for videos on topics such as the inner life of a cell.
- For a long-term solution, work on building your vocabulary.